

Of Stage & Screen

A Spy Spoof

By R. H. GARDNER

SOMEWHERE near the beginning of "The Second Best Secret Agent in the Whole Wide World," second-best-secret-agent Charles Vine reports to his boss, the head of British intelligence, for a new assignment.

Vine, take off your coat," commands the man behind the desk in the manner of all heads of intelligence services everywhere.

Vine does, revealing a rather natty waistcoat devoid of any obvious appurtenances.

"Where is your gun?" barks his superior suspiciously.

Vine turns around and points to a vicious-looking piece of machinery, about 2½ feet long, strapped to the middle of his back.

"Here," says the other, opening a desk drawer and holding up something the size of a paper-clip, "is your new gun."

'Not Serious'

"You're not serious," says Vine—which is true, because this new English film, now appearing at the Uptown Theater, is the first to admit, in both its title and dialogue, that it is a spoof of the James Bond series.

In their witty screenplay, Howard Griffiths and Lindsay Shonteff have referred to Bond several times without actually naming him, and the title-song contains the line, "He's every bit as good as what's-his-name."

Vine is every bit as good. In fact, as played with inspired timing by Tom Adams, he's even bet-

ter—which, translated into pertinent statistics, means that "The Second Best Secret Agent in the Whole Wide World" is twice as bloody, bawdy and bizarre as the average Bond movie and about ten times funnier.

Using the classic technique of parody — exaggeration — the Messrs. Griffiths and Shonteff have spun out a plot of such fabulous nonsense it defies synopsis. I will simply say it involves a scientist who maintains he has discovered a way to reverse the law of gravity and Vine's single-handed efforts to protect him from virtually everybody in the world.

Principal Antagonists

His principal instrument in this increasingly complex task—even the British authorities themselves are working against him—is his 2½-foot-long automatic, with which he dispatches at least half the population of London.

His principal antagonists are an Oriental who can pass as either a man or a woman, a Russian major who, through plastic surgery has been made into an identical facsimile of Vine, and Sadistikoff, an agent who "just loves to kill."

Discussing this last one, a Russian commissar observes that during slack periods, Sadistikoff works as a supervisor in a slaughterhouse. "He just loves to kill," says the commissar with a shrug.



Tom Adams has the title role in "The 2d Best Secret Agent in the Whole Wide World," the new attraction at the Uptown. The film is presented by Joseph E. Levine.

Adams, a newcomer who looks like a cross between George C. Scott and Ben Gazzara, adds a new satiric twist to the Bond image by delivering each line however banal, as if imparting something of enormous significance.

Hint Of Smile

Thus when the scientist, upon first meeting him, remarks that he understands Vine once was a scientist himself, Adams pauses for about three seconds, while staring the other straight in the eye. Then, with the hint of a

smile that never quite breaks through his granite face, he says with nut-cracking crispness, "Yes. I once studied mathematics."

This pointless pause is a device long favored by method actors who imagine that, by doing it, they are performing in depth. The difference is that Adams is kidding. The film, whose direction by Mr. Shonteff reflects its creators' satirical intention, is filled with gorgeous women, including an especially gorgeous one representing the Oriental in the female phase.